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DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2011.642530

Decentralization to the Household: Expansion and Limits of State Power in Rural Oromiya

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(*Received 15 June 2011; final version received __ Month 2011*)

This article sheds light on the impacts and dynamics of the latest decentralization phase in Ethiopia, which seeks to professionalize and democratize local government. Based on recent field research in Oromiya Region, we draw attention to the paradoxes inherent in the top-down decentralization of public administration within an authoritarian one-party state. On the one hand, decentralization in Oromiya has empowered *kebele* administrations and facilitated the expansion of service delivery into rural hinterlands. In particular the sub-*kebele* state and party structure is instrumentalized by local governments to mobilize and control households. On the other hand, state authority remains limited as peasants resist and subvert state-led development works and *kebele* officials must rely on clientelistic networks to implement policies. Consequently, decentralization and *kebele* reform in post-1991 Ethiopia have so far neither altered the tradition of hierarchical state-society relations nor improved the lack of genuine representative democracy at *kebele* level.

Keywords: decentralization; state-peasant relations; local government reform; party-state; Ethiopia

Introduction

In an attempt to break with the centralist and authoritarian legacy of the Ethiopian state, the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has overseen an ambitious decentralization agenda since assuming power 1991. While a four-tiered institutional set-up consisting of regional states, zones, districts, and *kebele* (sub-districts) was broadly maintained, Ethiopian state institutions were restructured in successive and partly overlapping phases of decentralization in the past two decades.[1] A first round of federal restructuring took place under the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991-1994) and ended with the adoption of the new federal constitution (December 1994), instituting nine predominantly ethnic-based regional states. A second phase was launched in 2001 with the District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP), increasing the administrative autonomy and capacity of district or *woreda* administrations.[2] Decentralization entered its third phase with various reforms, political as well as administrative, implemented at the *kebele* or local government level since the mid-2000s.

For the EPRDF, decentralization is the institutional solution for the country's historic nationality question. The 1994 constitution grants ethno-linguistic groups – dubbed "nations, nationalities and peoples" in Marxist-Leninist parlance – the right to self-determination at local and regional level. Decentralization is also praised as a modicum for more effective government service delivery and increased popular participation in local government. Post-1991 decentralization in Ethiopia has combined elements of deconcentration, i.e. a shift of administrative tasks from the federal and regional government to districts and *kebeles*, as well as the delegation of decision-making authority to lower bureaucratic entities, which are not directly controlled by the federal government.[3] Western donors and multilateral funders have generously supported these state reform programs to a remarkable extent, as part of their efforts to foster "good governance" and "democratization" in Ethiopia.[4] EPRDF's development policies and institutional reforms greatly expanded public service delivery in the last two decades, in particular health and education services. Yet Ethiopia's decentralization record remains strongly contested. Critics including opposition parties and human rights organizations as well as independent scholars argue that the centralized EPRDF party-state invalidates

many of the potential advantages of decentralization.[5] While the government vaunts the administrative reforms of the past decade as part of a "developmental state" that regularly delivers double digit economic growth, critics describe post-2005 decentralization as part of an authoritarian conversion by the EPRDF and its affiliated parties. Mass recruitment of EPRDF party members from 700 000 in 2005 to 5 million in 2010,[6] evidence that access to public services and livelihood security is increasingly conditional on party membership, the stifling of media and civil society organizations and, most importantly, 96.6 percent of the seats in the House of People's Representatives for EPRDF in the May 2010 federal and regional elections that is a reminder of the one party period of the *Derg* are indicators for this trend.[7]

Much has been written about the impacts of decentralization at the regional and district levels, yet relatively little research has been done on the dynamics of decentralization and administrative reform at the *kebele* level. As the lowest administrative unit the *kebele* and its organs are the most prominent embodiment of the state in rural areas. The *kebele* is an important service provider and the site of everyday encounters between the Ethiopian citizenry and its now "decentralized" government. Created by the *Derg* as peasant associations in 1975 – initially tasked with land-administration, tax collection and a range of development tasks but later transformed into a tool of repression and control[8] – *kebele* became increasingly professionalized and differentiated administrative bodies after 1991. Three reforms of the *kebele* stand out in particular in the past decade. First, in a bid to make the *kebele* more representative, legislative councils with up to 300 members tasked with appointing and overseeing the *kebele* executive cabinet were elected for the first time in the April 2008 elections.[9] Second, *kebele*'s administrative capabilities were enhanced with the appointment of more qualified civil servants as well as a *kebele* manager. Third, a sub-*kebele* structure that effectively fuses party and state personnel and interests was established in many rural areas of Tigray, Amhara, Oromiya and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR).[10] While these reforms are part and parcel of the government's decentralization program, the remaking of the *kebele* is clearly driven by an expansion of bureaucratic structures of control, which are a reminder of the *Derg*'s project of "encadrement".[11] Similarly, as a 2008 comparative study in four regional states

demonstrates, service delivery by the *kebele* remains "largely top-down, supply-led, government-organised and standardised"[12] in spite of the official rhetoric of participatory and accountable local administrations.

In this article we document recurrent political practices of the decentralized party-state at the *kebele* and sub-*kebele* levels. Based on recent fieldwork in Oromiya by the first and second author, we draw attention to the paradoxical effects resulting from the expansion of the Ethiopian state's "infrastructural power"[13] that took place in parallel with decentralization reforms at the (sub-)*kebele* level. Our empirical analysis offers a more ambiguous picture of post-2005 local government restructuring in Ethiopia and its impacts on state-society relations, contradicting the EPRDF story, but also some of the overly domination-focused accounts of the Ethiopian state at local level. While our case study material supports the observation of a growingly authoritarian Ethiopian state under the aegis of the ruling party, it also highlights how the expansion of the party-state in rural hinterlands is met with numerous obstacles. Although the new *kebele* structure enhances local officials' capacity to mobilize and coerce households into state-led development projects, we will also show how rural dwellers continue to subvert state capture. While the EPRDF as a party has augmented its outreach over voters after the incisive 2005 federal and regional elections, party membership more often may reflect an economic calculus rather than genuine political conviction. In addition, although the "professionalization" and "democratization" of the *kebele* administration have brought local government in close proximity to households, the impunity of corrupt or abusive *kebele* officials in some/many instances reproduces the normative distance that exists between state and society.

Of particular interest is the study of state-society interactions surrounding the recent decentralization and reform of local government in Oromiya, Ethiopia's most populous regional entity. Equally important is a first investigation of the heavily politicized party-state structure under the *kebele* level that has been observed in Oromiya.[14] Although focusing on different localities within Oromiya, the two multi-site case studies in this paper provide very similar accounts of the nexus between ruling party, state officials and peasantry in the process of local decentralization. They offer complementary insights into everyday interactions between (sub-)*kebele* party-state

representatives and local populations on the one hand and intra-institutional dynamics within the *kebele* administration on the other hand.

Our first case study investigates recent development activities of local government in rural Oromiya through the prism of state-led peasant mobilization. Focussing on the *garee misoma* and its role in rural road construction, the first author documents state-peasant interactions at *kebele*, *garee* and household levels based on three months of field research in Meta Robi *woreda* in mid-2009.[15] Meta Robi is located about 100 km northwest of Addis Ababa in West Shewa zone, connected by daily buses to the capital but highly dependent on low profitability subsistence farming. Rural dwellers in Meta Robi *woreda* predominantly identify as ethnic Oromo and adhere to the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Research concentrated in five of the district's 42 *kebele*, located in the sloping highlands at an altitude of 2400 to 2900 m.

Exploring everyday political practices of local administrators in the wake of decentralization reforms in Oromiya, the second case study assesses recurring dynamics within the newly created *kebele* councils and between local officials and the wider citizenry. It pays particular attention to the nexus between administrators' party membership and their lack of accountability in regard to land allocation and taxation. These observations are the condensed result of nine months of field research carried out by the second author in 2008 and 2009 in dozens of rural and urban municipalities in West Arsi, Southwest Shewa, East Wollega, East Hararghe and Borena zones. Inhabited by ethnic Oromo, research localities were purposively sampled to reflect variation in terms of religion, access to formal education and infrastructural development. Both researchers made use of semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, participatory observation and focus group discussions with civil servants, party members, elders, farmers, pastoralists and/or merchants in the various localities.

The following section provides a brief summary of the reformed *kebele* administration and the sub-*kebele* institutions. Although focusing on Oromiya, this overview of the latest phase of local government decentralization applies to other regions of Ethiopia as well. The subsequent sections present the two case studies, which illustrate some of the above-mentioned dynamics and analyze the impacts of local-level decentralization in rural Oromiya. While the first case study highlights interactions

between *kebele*, *garee misoma* and farmers in state-led rural road construction, the second case study sheds light on the dynamics within the *kebele* administration and on state-peasant relations in the context of an administrative reform that perpetuates abusive bureaucratic practices to the detriment of representative local government. In the final section we discuss the main findings of the two case studies and position them in regard to broader debates about the nature of post-1991 decentralization and democratization of the Ethiopian state.

The politics of local decentralization in Oromiya region

Ethnic federalism accommodated some of the key demands by Oromo nationalists – particularly the use of Afaan Oromoo as a language of instruction in schools – and produced an Oromo ethnic elite within the Ethiopian polity.[16] Yet competition over who politically represented the Oromo continued, if not intensified after 1991.[17] The administration of the region by the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), a constituent party of the ruling EPRDF, is fraught with controversy.[18] Since the 1992 fallout between the EPRDF and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), OLF sympathizers and members of more recent legal opposition parties such as the Oromo People's Congress (OPC[19]) and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) portray the OPDO as authoritarian, corrupt and a client of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that dominates the EPRDF. They contend that despite regime change and institutional reforms, Oromo continue to be victims of highland – this time Tigrayan rather than Amhara – repression and exploitation.[20] Contentious relations between OPDO officials and broad segments of the Oromo populations nurture recriminations, suspicion and regular government repression in local politics.[21] Opposition supporters and critics are regularly accused of being OLF members, "terrorists" or "anti-peace elements", an allegation that often leads to their imprisonment.[22] Student protests in various towns across Oromiya in the wake of the 2005 elections have been met with brutal repression by the federal police and other security organs.[23] As part of a carrot and stick approach, the OPDO ranks were swelled after 2005 as employment in the public sector and access to state services has become increasingly dependent on party membership.[24]

Decentralization has considerably altered the face of public administration in Oromiya in the past decade. After 2002 districts were empowered administratively by block grants that are directly transferred from the region, bypassing the zones.[25] Subsequently, *woreda* were given overall responsibility for providing rural services including agricultural extension services to *kebele* after 2002.[26] They thus represent the most powerful local government entity as the regional government awards little decision-making power to the *kebele*. Yet *kebele* play an important role in implementing *woreda* plans and policies. They are the "first point of contact" between state and society and are tasked with elaborating an annual development plan, collecting land and agricultural income tax, mobilizing communities to contribute to government initiated development projects, and conflict resolution through the social court.[27] *Kebele* administrations also issue identity cards, register, distribute and maintain housing, collect and provide documentary evidence related to a host of socio-demographic issues including residence or marriage status, communicate with the *woreda* and initiate a range of developmental activities. The *kebele* consists of three entities; a unicameral legislative council acting as the highest representative organ, the executive cabinet whose members are elected council members, and the judicative social court composed of three judges.[28] The usual term of office of all *kebele* authorities in Oromiya, including the social court, is five years in Oromiya.[29]

The reformed kebele

In 2008 the number of *kebele* council members in Oromiya was increased from – depending on local demographics – formerly 30 to 50 members to one to three hundred members.[30] The *kebele* council is accountable to the district council and the *kebele* electorate by which it is elected.[31] The expansion of the *kebele* councils was part of the government's "good governance package" aiming to enhance "participatory democracy" at local level.[32] Concomitantly and in a bid to re-assert its grasp over the electorate after the challenging 2005 federal and regional elections, the April 2008 elections allowed EPRDF to staff the augmented *kebele* councils with hundreds of thousands of party loyalists.[33] In Amhara Region, Lefort observed that the vast majority of new *kebele* councilors elected in 2008 were either party members or 'model farmers', i.e. peasants

whom the government considered as role models in adopting new agricultural extension programs.[34]

The *kebele* cabinet is located at the *kebele* field office where the everyday administration of the *kebele* is run.[35] The main task of the *kebele* cabinet, as defined in the 2008 Oromiya constitution, is to plan and implement development activities: its members shall "[p]repare development plans and programmers [sic], submit to the Kebele Council for approval and implement same".[36] Legally the *kebele* cabinet consists of the *kebele* administrator, his deputy and other members that "shall be determined by law".[37] Most cabinet members receive only a small stipend, but their status and party membership qualifies them for other state sponsored handouts.[38] According to the Oromiya constitution the *kebele* chairperson is appointed "upon recommendation by a political party or a coalition of political parties that constitutes a majority in the Council".[39] Before 2008 the *kebele* cabinet consisted, in most cases, of three council members who shouldered the tasks of *kebele* chairperson (or administrator), his or her deputy and the secretary as well as four office heads in charge of administration and justice, social court, security (militia), and women affairs.[40] These office heads are nominated by the *kebele* chairman, but approved by the council.[41] After 2008, these cabinet members also oversee the work of the *kebele*'s civil servants, namely the development agent responsible for agricultural extension, the head of school and the head of health, which together form the *kebele* administration.[42] Civil servants tend to have higher formal education levels than the cabinet members, in the case of Oromiya region they have completed at least 10th or 12th grade and hold a certificate.[43]

Another recent invention of local government reform in Ethiopia is the position of *kebele* manager. According to Lefort *kebele* managers were appointed to relieve the cabinet from secretarial tasks, to mediate between local officials and the community as well as to advise cabinet members.[44] Known in Amharic as *yesira halafi* or "the head in charge of work",[45] the *kebele* manager attends both *kebele* council and cabinet meetings and supervises all development activities by the *kebele*. Despite his name and function, the *kebele* manager is fully employed by and ultimately answers to the *woreda*, often officiating as a de facto counter-power to the *kebele* chairman.[46] He is widely seen as an element of "upward accountability" that characterizes the four-tiered Ethiopian public

administration.[47] The creation of the *kebele* manager is evidence of the contradictions inherent in the latest round of decentralization in Ethiopia. It reflects both the resoluteness with which EPRDF has expanded local government capacities and service delivery and the concomitance and continuity of hierarchical intra-government relations and practices that undermine the very principle of decentralization. Furthermore, the *kebele* manager marries a neo-liberal understanding of public management with bureaucratic and party control by higher echelon district officials.

Sub-kebele institutions

In addition to augmenting the *kebele*'s bureaucratic capacities, the regional government strengthened the *kebele* administration through the creation sub-*kebele* institutions known as *gott* (hamlet) and *garee* (group or team) in rural areas throughout Oromiya.[48] In doing so, the *kebele* was divided territorially into groups of households; while the *gott* usually contains between sixty to ninety households, the *garee* groups together about twenty to thirty households.[49] The *garee* consists of the household heads who live within the *garee* territory.[50] *Garee* members elect representatives who form a five member committee. A *gott* committee of the same size supervises three *garee* and links them to the *kebele*, establishing a chain of accountability between *garee* committee, *gott* committee and *kebele* officials. In 2008 the Oromiya regional government dissolved the *gott* committees and the *garee* committees were placed under direct supervision of the *kebele*. Although the *gott* was disbanded institutionally, it continued to exist as a geographical principle of organizing the *garee*. In line with this change the *garee* committees were restructured and reduced to three representatives; the *garee* chairman, the secretary and the cashier.

While the *gott* and *garee* were recently established in Oromiya, similar institutions were introduced before in other regions such as Amhara, Tigray or SNNPRS.[51] Historically, the *garee* can be traced back to the *mengistawi budin* or 'government team', which was created by the *Derg* and which is mainly documented in regard to its purpose in state-led development.[52] Based on information obtained in Meta Robi *woreda*, both the *garee* and the *mengistawi budin* engaged in development related activities but differ in organizational and territorial terms. The *mengistawi budin* was constituted by three leaders; a woman representative, a youth representative and a

member of the administration. While the number of *mengistawi budin* within each peasant association (former *kebele*) is difficult to reconstruct, the present *garee* and the historic *mengistawi budin* do not overlap geographically in Meta Robi. Despite these differences, community members saw the two in historic continuity. Hence an elder explained that "[w]hat was once called *budin* is now called *garee*" and a young farmer even clarified "[a]lthough we say that it is conceptually the same, it is not".[53]

EPRDF presents participation as the means by which the government is brought to the people and responds to popular demands.[54] In Oromiya the *garee* figures as the most decentralized organization improving administration in rural areas and enabling community participation in local development projects.[55] *Garee* members form a fairly permanent group – the so-called *garee misoma* or development team – which provides the manual labor necessary for building the infrastructure of various development projects related to irrigation, education, health or rural roads. The composition of the development team can vary slightly depending on the work at hand: e.g. by excluding widows or more elderly persons or by including additional, predominantly young, household members. The *garee misoma*'s activities mainly take place on non-working days such as weekends or religious holidays and they account for one to three days per month.

However, there are also more critical interpretations regarding the ultimate *raison d'être* of the *gott* and *garee*. While the sub-*kebele* structure "acts as a channel of communication and mobilization for a given number of households" as Dessalegn Rahmato remarked, the sub-*kebele* structure has also been criticized as a highly politicized government "tool of control as well as development".[56] A series of reports issued by Human Rights Watch describe the *gott* and *garee* in Oromiya as effective mechanisms for suppressing political dissent against the ruling and omnipresent OPDO.[57] Contradicting the supposedly voluntary character of participation in the sub-*kebele* development teams, observers have drawn attention to the overlap between *gott* and *garee* on the one hand and a decentralized party cell structure on the other hand.[58] Hence Bevan concludes that the penetration of households by state-party officials serves primarily a propagandistic purpose, aiming to convince farmers of the benefits of joining

government sponsored rural development programs and, ultimately, voting for the EPRDF.[59]

The *garee misoma* as a bridge between peasantry and the state

Rural road construction in Meta Robi reflects the importance of the sub-*kebele*, but is also in continuation with a long history of top-down policies and interventions by the Ethiopian state at local level. The *Derg* ordered peasants to organize in so-called *mengistawi budin* and to take part in development activities as rural road construction works within the *kebele*, formerly known as peasant association. With the arrival of the EPRDF, *kebele* militia began to shoulder the responsibility of mobilizing the peasantry for development projects. As one farmer remembered: "The people themselves maintained the road and were organized by the *kebele* chairman. The *kebele* chairman ordered the people by the militia who have guns. The militia was given an assignment and it was done accordingly".[60] After 2003, the *garee* inherited the task of peasant mobilization in Meta Robi from its predecessors.[61]

Peasant mobilization

The *garee* is instrumental in road construction in rural parts of Oromiya region. Its functioning must be understood in a broader set of hierarchical development encounters between local government officials and populations. At the district level, the Woreda Rural Road Office (WRRO) is tasked with the administration, construction and maintenance of rural roads.[62] While the WRRO plans the district's rural road network, its role in construction is reduced to sporadic coordination and supervision as it tasks the *kebele* administration with the actual construction works. *Kebele* officials then mobilize the peasantry in several steps: First, *kebele* officials and *garee* leaders hold meetings to gather the inhabitants of the locality and inform them about the impending works. Second, the *kebele* administration divides the planned road geographically and assigns each *garee* to a particular section. Third, the *kebele* instructs *garee* leaders to convene their members at a specific time and place. Fourth, the *garee* leader orders his *garee* members – organized in a team of about twenty to thirty laborers – to build the road.

Garee leaders also participate in and coordinate the manual works that consists in clearing the surface and digging the floor's unevenness. Furthermore, they oversee *garee* members' presence at the worksite and regularly report to the *kebele* administration.

Kebele officials deploy a variety of discourses and strategies to rally the peasantry for government-led development projects. Their rhetoric emphasizes the major role and importance of rural roads for development in terms of health, communication, education, transport, agriculture or market access. This development rhetoric is articulated regularly during *kebele* as well as *garee* meetings and appropriates a great deal of national development policy discourse, which is transplanted to the local arena.[63] In conversations with *kebele* and *garee* officials, they argued that the expected benefits of new rural roads convinced local people to participate in their construction. Contrary to local officials' perception, interviews with *garee* members and ordinary peasants revealed that participants in rural road construction projects did so primarily because they were ordered to, not because they saw it as a beneficial development effort in their interest. For example, a farmer complained that "[w]e don't say anything, they just order us (…) participation does not change anything".[64]

When it comes to government-led development initiatives, rural dwellers in Meta Robi perceive little difference between participation and mobilization and some even used these terms interchangeably in interviews. In reality, *garee* leaders mobilize farmers and instruct them to partake in construction efforts as manual laborers. The *garee* leader justifies his actions by reference to the written letter received from the *kebele* and hence as the consequence of an order received from above. Furthermore, armed militia accompany the *garee* leader and enforce his authority in case people refuse to participate in rural road construction.[65] Several participants referred to the coercive role of the *kebele* militia and particularly their gun, which represents a powerful tool in mobilizing the peasantry. Peasants who refuse to take part in rural road construction are fined both at *garee* and *kebele* level. Informants further reported that a refusal to participate in rural construction can also result in losing access to those resources distributed by the state such as fertilizer or land, as well as range of legal and administrative sanctions by the *kebele* administration. Individuals who refuse to follow these orders are often accused of being OLF members or sympathizers and of acting against the government.[66] This

accusation carries potentially devastating consequences. It not only threatens ordinary farmers but also *garee* leaders who resist the *kebele*'s orders.

It is this combination of local government's authoritarian traits and its control over rural means of production,[67] which compels peasants to comply with the *kebele*'s demand for unpaid labor. However, from the viewpoint of some of those who participate in rural road construction, this very act offers an opportunity to ensure access to state controlled resources such as agricultural inputs or land. In Meta Robi, a farmer's ability to maintain his livelihood crucially depends on maintaining good relations with local government. In his analysis, Pausewang argues that "[a]ccess to land is a question of life and death for an Ethiopian peasant".[68] As a young farmer in Meta Robi stated: "[w]e hope that the government helps us if we participate (…) in *garee* activities (…). But so far, we did not win the lottery".[69] Vice versa, farmers' compliance with demands to provide unpaid labour to rural road construction reproduces state authority at local level as evidenced in the following statement by a *garee* leader: "Most people participate because we ordered them. We did not force people but they agreed themselves".[70] Rather than a forum where people can voice their demands, the *garee* is utilized by *kebele* administrators as an instrument to mobilize the peasantry. In Meta Robi the *garee* did not initiate development activities on its own. As a *garee* leader clarified: "We just order people to attend meetings when we are ordered from above".[71] In popular perception, *garee* gatherings or activities never occurred on an independent or autonomous basis, but were always the result of a prior order from above.

The government's long arm

The creation of the *garee* has significantly enhanced government control at household level and reflects an expansion of state power far beyond its claimed development realm. Several informants emphasized *garee* leaders' proximity to the community as an advantage for them in reaching out to those expected to enroll in state-led development projects. As a *woreda* official pointed out: "The main reason for the establishment [of the *garee*] is more control over the people to participate".[72] This squares with Dessalegn Rahmato's conclusion that "[t]he new government has thus extended the power and influence of the state even further than the *Derg*".[73] This claim is also echoed by

Pankhurst who argues that "[d]espite decentralization (…) state penetration has reached deeper than ever before into rural society".[74]

When compared to the prior period when militia shouldered the task of peasant mobilization, the *garee* has significantly augmented the *kebele* administration's capacity to mobilize the peasantry as well as to implement development policy. This said, the importance of the *garee* in rallying peasants for construction works was relatively short-lived and decreased after 2005. During field research in mid-2009, *kebele* officials insisted that the *garee* worked efficiently in a variety of development related activities, but this view was often contradicted in private conversations. Vaughan and Tronvoll's observed that "local administrators control the public political arena at the local village level, and (…) their authority is seldom publicly questioned by the people".[75] This also holds true for Meta Robi where some informants argued in private that the *garee* is weak. This viewpoint is nicely captured in the following explanation by one of the *garee* leaders:

> (…) once we constructed a school, road, health clinic, but the *garee* leaders are currently sitting at home and the *garee* leader is in his house. At the same time, people are farming and treating their crops, but they may participate in *kebele* activities if they are ordered. (…) Look, the *garee* is existing in name, but is not functional. In the past there were meetings held at the *garee* level, but today there are just meetings at the *kebele*. (…) The *garee* as such has no initiative to hold meetings and the *garee* gets weaker and weaker.[76]

While this account emphasizes the *garee*'s inactivity, it also reveals that the *garee* remains institutionalized and its leaders are kept in place.

Besides mobilizing peasants for development projects, the *garee* is at the center of local government's political control and surveillance of households and an important channel for government information and propaganda. Several informants reported that the *garee* was used by the ruling OPDO to mobilize voters and advocate for their policies in the run-up to the contested 2005 federal and regional elections. More importantly, as a *kebele* manager stated, the *garee* "keeps security and counteracts aggression, which is directed against the government".[77] He further argued that the *garee* collects information about those who act against the regime and that it advises people not to follow the

"enemy". Since the *garee* leader lives among the people, "the *garee* knows everything, also the secrets of the people".[78] Vaughan and Tronvoll report very similar practices by peasant associations during the *Derg* regime: "[L]ocal administrators worked as informers and spies, keeping the grassroots under surveillance and reporting any 'anti-revolutionary' and 'anti-government' activities back to the party and intelligence services".[79]

In Meta Robi, the boundaries between the state and the ruling party are blurred both in their officials' daily practices and in ordinary people's perception. This is apparent not only in the way the ruling party instrumentalizes the *garee*, but also in the way state and party structures overlap at household level. In the district's countryside, the OPDO's outreach has expanded significantly since early 2009 through the creation and multiplication of local party cells, locally called *celli*. Their establishment aimed at consolidating the ruling party at the household level by promoting the government's development efforts and achievements among the populace. A cell leader described the cell's activities as follows: "We study newspapers every two weeks (…) to produce members for the party, the OPDO, that's the main objective".[80] Following the establishment of the cell, several former *gott* and *garee* leaders became cell leaders in their respective locality. The overlap between state (*garee*) and party (OPDO cell) leaders makes it difficult – if not impossible – to distinguish between the ruling party and the state. Rural dwellers hardly perceive a difference between the local state structure and the party structure. Some interlocutors argued that the cell is just another name for the *garee*.[81] A cell leader emphasized that "both are the same and both work for the government (…) all people are members of the OPDO and other statements are propaganda".[82] Others assumed that the cell has substituted the *gott*, executes the *kebele*'s orders and therefore commands authority over the *garee*.[83]

Avoiding the garee

Except for the *garee* and cell leaders, Meta Robi's inhabitants do not identify with the *garee* but rather perceive it as part of the government. Thus, a distance between peasantry and local party-state persists, limiting the ability of a decentralized government to fully encapsulate households and opening up a space in which the latter can be challenged. In

private conversations few ordinary people support the government and its development initiatives. As a farmer complained: "I don't understand the purpose of the government because there is no development and change at all. Although there are so many obligations and they strive for bringing their own power structure but I see no development".[84] An elder lamented: "They have done nothing and the *garee* is for nothing. They put the name *garee*, they call for meetings, they hold a speech, but they do nothing".[85] Intrusive interventions by the government and its manipulation of the *garee* reproduce and at times even widen the gap between peasantry and the state. As a result *garee* leaders' social standing in the community is constrained as they derive their authority from their privileged relation with the *kebele* administrator and the militia. Several *garee* leaders expressed the difficulty they faced when attempting to convince households to follow *kebele* directives. As one *garee* leader complained: "If we try to widen up the road, the people do not participate and even elect us away (…) we don't have power".[86]

Moreover, the abatement of *garee*-led rural road construction activities after 2005 gave peasants some elbow room to resist government mobilization.[87] Rural dwellers interpreted the *garee*'s inactivity in different terms. While some agreed that there is no choice in obeying the government's order, others questioned the *garee*'s authority. As a young farmer stated: "So far, I have not observed *garee* activities because the people do not accept the *garee*'s order".[88] During field research in mid-2009, also refusing to take part in *kebele* meetings was a recurrent and accepted practice among local farmers in Meta Robi. However, it was mainly understood that the *kebele* "would be" strong enough to achieve people's participation for activities of the *kebele*. In his analysis of state-peasant relations in Ethiopia, Aspen argues that as a result of the deep imbalance of power the peasants' most rational strategy is "to minimise the contact with the state by obeying only the inescapable demands it imposes on the peasantry, and otherwise to ignore it".[89] Despite the recent decentralization of the party-state to the household level in rural Oromiya, peasants continue to honor the maxim of avoiding the state whenever possible, and obeying the required works whenever necessary.

The establishment of the *garee* also sparked criticism by some *garee* leaders. In many ways the appointment of numerous *garee* leaders at household level increases local

government's presence in ordinary people's lives. Indeed, there are *garee* leaders who genuinely support the government as the following example shows:

> For me this government is great and I have never seen such a government in my life. They show us that they are strong and we believe in it. The government advises us and because of these advices people are capable to manage their life, to work properly, especially on their farm, and to cooperate with each other.[90]

However, in conversations various *garee* leaders question for example the instrumentalization of the *garee* by the OPDO during the 2005 elections, the authoritarian interventions by *kebele* and *woreda* officials or the government's approach to rural development. At least in private, these leaders challenge state authority, yet most of them maintain their position as *garee* leaders within the established structure.

Kebele reform and the (un-)making of representative local government

The benefit of occupying a position in one of the *kebele* organs is evident in the case of the executive cabinet. The *kebele*'s control over land, agricultural inputs and public services is important to understand local officials' desire to achieve or maintain access to these state controlled resources. Within the decentralized local government bureaucrats, civil servants and party members compete for positions and influence at *kebele* level.[91] Tensions that are inherent to a decentralization process driven by a dominant party-state come to the forefront as local officials legitimize their actions both in terms of their position within the party and in terms of their bureaucratic expertise. Political loyalty to the ruling OPDO on the one hand, and education that qualifies for civil service on the other hand thus accompany *kebele* reform, co-existing as conflicting repertoires mobilized by local officials.[92]

Mobilizing the party shield

The predominant role of the OPDO in Oromiya's political life has a strong bearing on the *kebele* councils. Although some of the opposition parties are legally registered, no of them can compete with the ruling OPDO for seats in the *kebele* as well as district

councils. As a result, all members of the *kebele* councils are either members of or at least supporters of the ruling party what reflects the little space for opposition parties to participate in the region's governance. Given this unanimity of political opinion within the councils, their legislative function is limited. In practice it is rather the *kebele* cabinet that holds the real power within the *kebele*, often by dictating or manipulating the council. *Kebele* cabinet members rather than councilors influence the daily lives of urban and rural dwellers, which explains why the first are much better known in the community than the second.

Although the Oromiya government has made efforts to improve the planning and implementation capacity of *kebele* administrations by recruiting more educated civil servants, these measures have not yet achieved their objective. One of the reasons for this failure is the difficult cooperation between *kebele* cabinet members. In contrast to the other cabinet member appointed from the *kebele* council, civil servants became nominated upon recommendation of the local OPDO branch because they were assumed to be "more educated" and resistant to the way the incumbent government administers the people. In contrast, *kebele* administrators often suspect these professionals to be resistant and are therefore at unease collaborating with them. A recurrent pattern reported in West Arsi zone in beginning of 2008 is the following; when the educated cabinet members want to suggest measures by which local people participate in development activities, the other four cabinet members – in this case the chairperson, deputy, secretary and head of women affairs – are often reluctant, partly because they consider themselves as politically more important.[93] In case the more educated cabinet members attempt to defy the maladministration of the four cadres, they can be transferred to another locality, which might be distant from infrastructural facilities including health centers, markets and roads. The denoted reason for this is that the *kebele* administrator – often without consulting with the rest of the council members – reports to the district administration that his colleagues are resisting government directives, which can lead to their dismissal or transfer. As this report indicates, the later are expected to be submissive to the "less educated" administrators and members of the ruling party more generally. Likewise, people are also expected to submit to the administrators regardless of what they have done as part of their official duties.

To be considered for appointment as a member of the *kebele* administration, one has to join the ruling OPDO party. It is essentially this party membership, which licenses *kebele* officials to use public office for their personal advantage. This phenomenon has maybe dampened popular acceptance of the OPDO in Oromiya most, although Oromo now have the right to use their own language in regional administration and as medium of instruction in schools and regional colleges. Informants in different parts of the region pointed out a spreading of corruption by local officials, a practice that seems to have percolated with decentralization from regional to *kebele* level. In informal discussions interlocutors would make this point by saying that "These days, bribe taking has come and [sic] knocking at our door and windows. Before this government, it was far from us and we knew it more at district and above levels".[94]

Kebele administrators make strategic use of their party membership to shield themselves from criticism of their conduct by the public. Their reluctance to cooperate with more educated civil servants within the cabinet, their tendency to distance themselves from the population rather than engaging with them, and their use of public office for personal advantages are rendered possible by their party affiliation. As they are ultimately accountable to the OPDO, *kebele* administrators are protected from criticism and disapproval by non-party members until the party decides to remove them. However, the great challenge of local politics in Oromiya is that there is no criterion for knowing who supports the opposition. Consequently, deterrence of opposition supporters is largely only based on suspicion, which in turn allows certain administrators to stay in power by frightening individuals with allegations of subversive intent.[95] To this effect, becoming an OPDO party member is advantageous as it allows deterring others from making unfounded accusations.[96] Many educated civil servants within *kebele* cabinets have joined the party for this reason, although their original mandate was less political, namely to assist the local cabinet executive.

Abuses by kebele administrators

Kebele administrators are aware that they will eventually be removed from their post and they therefore attempt to make use of the opportunities that present themselves while being in office. Publicly officials underline that they exercise and embody the rule of law,

daunting those who resist or question their actions. Anybody who attempts to challenge malpractices by the *kebele* administration risks being accused as an OLF supporter. Since the four core members of the *kebele* cabinet usually are familiar with one another, either as party and work colleagues or because of close kinship ties, they are often at the center of a clientelistic network that includes selected farmers and elders in the community and party officials at district level. In many cases these networks serve the purpose of soliciting bribes in exchange for administrative favors. For instance, *kebele* administrators might expect a bribe for giving an individual an urban land plot, (re-)allocating farming or grazing land, or settling other administrative issues. Those who have money and ties with *kebele* officials are thus in a privileged position to obtain services or have their case decided in their favor.

As informants in Southwest Shewa, North Shewa and West Arsi zones reported, bribing *kebele* officials is common and it excludes certain segments of the community – those with less financial means – from access to public services including urban and rural land. Bribes are usually paid in cash and at times are accompanied by an invitation for beer. In some parts of Oromiya this practice has motivated merchants to bring beer from urban areas and sell them in rural villages. Peasants typically invite *kebele* executive members of their locality for beers, but enjoy themselves with *areqee* (local drink) while officials discuss and decide on the matter of the petitioner.[97] Hotels and beer houses are thus important sites where *kebele* members settle individual cases presented to them. In this sense *kebele* offices exist primarily to provide an aura of legality to decisions made in beer houses. In some localities *kebele* officials are regularly found in places where beer is served and it is easier to encounter them in the beer house than their workplace.

Administrators also use their power to (re-)allocate urban and rural land within the *kebele* to solicit bribes. Land use disagreements are settled by the *kebele* and claimants know that they need to pay something. If one of the parties appeals to the district administration, the latter may refer the case back to the *kebele* administration. This is a common practice in Oromiya, giving *kebele* officials considerable sway in determining who has access to farmland. Local inhabitants thus depend on the goodwill of *kebele* administrators as they have little alternative legal recourses available. Another major opportunity for corruption are *kebele* court decisions pertaining to contested land

allocation. As evidenced by the following statement by Tadele Nagisho, president of the Oromiya Regional State Supreme Court, the region's authorities recognizes the problem posed by the multiplication of land disputes, which end up in courtroom:

> Claims and counter-claims pertaining to farming land represent the most common cases of which individuals often accuse each other in Oromiya region. They account for about seventy to eighty percent of all cases that are presented to court. (…) For instance, within six months, that is, in 2009, three thousand land-based cases were presented to court. (…) In this process, families and friends of claimants and counter claimants accompany and also 'attend' the court. This is greatly damaging their livelihood because they are spending more time in attending cases. In addition, farmers, merchants, and government employees are all upset and thought about court process in the region.[98]

As under previous regimes land taxation rates are decided by higher authorities and then forwarded to *kebele* administrators. As local inhabitant have little information about tax issues, *kebele* officials at times may use this gap to their benefit by demanding arbitrary tax amounts from different households. They may thus order some households on whom they want to revenge to pay more tax than the legal requirement, splitting the difference among themselves. In other cases certain households are asked to pay taxes twice a year instead of once. In all these cases abusive *kebele* officials draw on their privileged relations with district officials. Such abuses as reported by informants in West Arsi zone undermine local level-decentralization. Both the federal and the Oromiya governments have admitted that the delegation of power to districts has been faced with challenges such as a "lack of well established local governance system accountable to local people and responsible to service delivery" and "lack of commitment and attention by sector bureaus".[99]

Conclusion

In this article we have analyzed recurrent administrative practices and intra-institutional patterns by *kebele* and sub-*kebele* officials as part of the latest round of decentralization in Oromiya. Highlighting everyday interactions among local officials and between the

party-state and the broader populace, our empirical material reveals a reproduction of hierarchical state-society relations that co-exist with (and at times are reinforced by) decentralization and local government reform. Rather than enhancing community participation in local state affairs or making the *kebele* more accountable, state-society interactions at *kebele* and sub-*kebele* level in Oromiya continue to be informed by a deeply rooted tradition of hierarchy. In this authoritarian tradition of *mengist* (government) local administrators dispose of discretionary powers in commanding and controlling peasant labour and other contributions to the state, most importantly political loyalty. Peasant mobilization for state-led development activities at sub-*kebele* level is informed by a logic according to which the party-state issues orders and people obey.[100] A similar imposition of hierarchical relations is observable within *kebele* cabinets where "more educated" civil servants are expected to submit to less professionally qualified, but more politically connected cabinet members. The investigation of *kebele* administration practices in Oromiya demonstrates how local bureaucrats make strategic use of their position in the party-state to obtain personal benefits and maintain power in the local political arena. Similar strategies are observable at *garee* level, as popular participation is not only the result of state coercion, but is also a strategy to access state controlled services.

Decentralization in Oromiya has empowered *kebele* administrations and facilitated the expansion of state authority to rural hinterlands. Particularly the *garee* is instrumentalized by the *kebele*, operating as the long arm of the government, which mobilizes, surveys and controls households far beyond its proclaimed developmental goals. Yet the power of the local party-state is neither absolute nor unlimited as peasants and even *garee* leaders also resist or subvert state-led development works and *kebele* officials must rely on clientelistic networks to implement policies. In this sense the convoluted nexus between mass party, state and people that characterizes the everyday politics of EPRDF's "revolutionary democracy" is both a source of strength and weakness. Although local government expands to households in the guise of "decentralization" and the name of "development", this process – which critics describe as an intrusion by an authoritarian government – also provides some room for maneuver for those who seek to utilize the party-state for their own ends. Hence, accounts of

absolute and unchecked bureaucratic domination by the OPDO in Oromiya as suggested by some Oromo nationalists and human rights organizations deserve more nuance.[101]

This said, the lack of genuine representative democracy within the restructured *kebele* is evident. Although citizens have the right to elect representatives to the *kebele* council every five years, *kebele* cabinet members who play a much more important role in people's everyday lives, eschew popular election. In Oromiya region the administrators are selected from and appointed by the *kebele* council upon recommendation of the ruling party.[102] As a result, administrators are more accountable to the *kebele* council and the district administration than to the electorate. Similarly, at sub-*kebele* level *garee* members elect *garee* leaders as their "representatives", but they hardly feel represented by the *garee*. Contrary to official claims the *garee* is widely perceived as part of the state structure and not as a platform where people can express their demands. So far, local government decentralization in Oromiya has failed to produce increased political participation and administrative accountability. The conflation of party and state officials and agendas, the top-down imposition of rural development initiatives and the expansion of party-state control over rural masses counter the promises of "good governance" associated with a decentralized administration.[103]

Post-1991 decentralization in Oromiya, which seeks to "promote and support the people's self-rule at all levels",[104] remains – depending on one's viewpoint – either an unfulfilled promise or work in progress. As optimistic decentralization proposals become embedded in local arenas and existing power relations, self-preservation by the party and individual officials trump efforts to break with the authoritarian legacies of the Ethiopian state. While the reformed *kebele* and the creation of the *garee* have decentralized the state to the household level, they did not bring the OPDO-run government closer to the people. As one of the author's informants observed pessimistically: "Government policies seem [like a] mountain at region, but shrink to the size of [a] camel, [a] leaf, and finally turn to ash at zone, district, and *kebele* [level] respectively".[105]

Acknowledgements

This article is dedicated to the loving memory of our friend and co-author Sibilo Keno who died in June 2010 before completing his doctoral research project on political practices of decentralization at local level in Oromiya. We thank Jon Abbink, Johan Helland and Siegfried Pausewang for helpful comments on an earlier draft. The authors acknowledge the support of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research North-South (NCCR North-South).

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Notes

[1] Also called *killil*, zone, *woreda* and *kebele* in Amharic respectively.

[2] Dessalegn Rahmato, *Peasant and the State*, 244; Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher and Kassahun Berhanu, "Literature Review," 10.

[3] Rondinelli, "Government Decentralization". According to Rondinelli's classic distinction ("Government Decentralization", 138), decentralization in Ethiopia does not correspond to devolution, which entails "that local government be given autonomy and independence and be clearly perceived of a separate level over which central authorities exercise little or no direct control." (p. 138). For different typologies of decentralization in Ethiopia see Meheret Ayenew ("Decentralization") or Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher and Kassahun Berhanu ("Literature Review").

[4] The DLDP transferred planning, fiscal and administrative autonomy from the regions to the district (Dessalegn Rahmato, *Peasant and the State*, 244-6; Meheret Ayenew, "Decentralization"; Meheret Ayenew, "Wereda Decentralization"; Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher and Kassahun Berhanu, "Literature Review," 10, 26) and was a major component of the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) (2002-2005). A more comprehensive decentralization package that included civil service and tax revenues reform as well as urban management capacity-building was implemented under the Public Sector Capacity Building Program (PSCAP), which was part of the subsequent Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (2005-2010). After 2005 the Protection of Basic Services Program supported district and *kebele* service delivery (Spielman, Cohen and Tewodaj Mogues, "Local Governance Systems"; Taye Assefa, *Digest of Ethiopia*). These and other programs were significantly funded by (Western) donor countries and the World Bank.

[5] Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism"; Abbink, "Ethiopian Second Republic"; ICG, "Ethiopia"; Keller, "State and Nation"; Paulos Chanie, "Clientelism"; Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*.

[6] HRW, "Development without Freedom," 67.

[7] Aalen and Tronvoll, "End of Democracy"; HRW, "Development without Freedom"; HRW, "Ways of Putting Pressure"; Only two seats in parliament did not go to the EPRDF – one to the opposition and one to an EPRDF-friendly independent candidate (Tronvoll, "Elections").

[8] Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia*.

[9] Before the April 2008 local elections *kebele* councils consisted of maximum 15 members including the chairman, vice-chairman and secretary (Aalen and Tronvoll, "Local Elections," 116).

[10] Bevan, "MDG-ing"; HRW, "Development without Freedom"; HRW, "Suppressing Dissent"; HRW, "Ways of Putting Pressure"; Lefort, "Post-2005 Interlude"; Segers et al., "Be Like Bees."

[11] Clapham, "Controlling Space," 14.

[12] Pankhurst, *Local Accountability Mechanisms*, 25.

[13] Mann, "Power of the State."

[14] HRW ("Suppressing Dissent," 30) initially referred to as *gott* and *garee*.

[15] A more extensive account of the role of the *garee misoma* in rural road construction in Meta Robi is found in Emmenegger ("Decentralization to the Household"; "Roads of Decentralization").

[16] Keller, "Oromo Nation."

[17] For a critical engagement with the notion of a homogenous Oromo nation see Haneke ("Oromo Identity") or Sorenson ("Learning to be Oromo"). The emergence of a collective Oromo national consciousness is of relatively recent date as Oromos are divided into at least five groups; Wellega Oromos who are mostly Protestant farmers, Oromos in Shoa who are often Amharized, small groups of Oromo pastoralists in the South, conservative Muslim Oromos in Hararghe region and agro-pastoral Borana living in the Ethio-Kenyan borderlands (Tronvoll, *Ethiopia*, 8).

[18] The core of the OPDO was initially constituted by former Oromo prisoners of war that the TPLF had captured during the conflict with the *Derg*. The OPDO won all 537 seats in the regional council in the May 2010 elections.

[19] Formerly the Oromo National Congress (ONC).

[20] Mohammed Hassan, "Against the Oromo."

[21] Pausewang, "View from Below," 77.

[22] Remnants of the OLF, itself divided by internal power struggles and a recent expulsion from its Kenyan hinterlands, carry out sporadic attacks against government building and officials.

[23] Arriola, "Politics of Protest."

[24] Aalen and Tronvoll, "Local Elections"; ICG, "Ethiopia."

[25] The same district reform occurred in Amhara, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and later on the remaining regions.

[26] Dessalegn Rahmato, *Peasant and the State*, 246; Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher and Kassahun Berhanu, "Literature Review," 15, 26; Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 92.

[27] Yilmaz and Venugopal, "Local Government Discretion," 6, 12. Bevan, Pankhurst and Lavers, *Ethiopian Village Studies*, 63; Oromiya Regional State, "Revised Constitution," art. 92.

[28] Oromiya Regional State, "Revised Constitution," art. 46, 76, 90 (91 and 95); Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher and Kassahun Berhanu, "Literature Review," 13-14). The names and functions of the *kebele* organs are subject to considerable terminological confusion. Partly reflecting inconsistent translations between Amharic and English, partly echoing the perplex division of labor between the *kebele* council (formally the highest representative body but de facto playing a rather ceremonial role) and the *kebele* cabinet (formally executing the development priorities decided by the council but de facto instrued by the *woreda*). Hence the *kebele* cabinet is sometimes also referred to as "*kebele* administration" or "*kebele* administrative council" and the *kebele* administrator and chairman are one and the same. The Amharic name for the *kebele* cabinet is *sira asfetsami*, while the council is referred to as *gubae* or *mikir bet* and the social court is known as *mehaberawi fird bet* (Pankhurst, *Local Accountability Mechanisms*, 11).

[29] Dessalegn Rahmato, *Peasant and the State*, 247.

[30] District council speaker Mamo Kedir in discussion with the second author, Dodolla, March 2008. See also Yilmaz and Venugopal, "Local Government Discretion," 5-6.

[31] Oromiya Regional State, "Revised Constitution," art. 91 (2-3).

[32] Yilmaz and Venugopal, "Local Government Discretion," 8.

[33] Aalen and Tronvoll, "Local Elections," 116.

[34] Lefort, "Post-2005 Interlude," 443.

[35] Kumera Kanea, "Decentralized Governance."

[36] Oromiya Regional State, "Revised Constitution," art. 96 (1a).

[37] Ibid., art. 95 (1).

[38] Yilmaz and Venugopal, "Local Government Discretion," 7.

[39] Oromiya Regional State, "Revised Constitution," art. 97 (1).

[40] Vaughan and Tronvoll (*Culture of Power*, 42) point out that, according to capacity and need, the *kebele* cabinet was occasionally composed of five or nine individuals before 2008, for example in charge of mass mobilization.

[41] Dessalegn Rahmato, *Peasant and the State*, 247; Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher and Kassahun Berhanu, "Literature Review," 13-14.

[42] Interview with *kebele* manager, Meta Robi, August 26, 2009.

[43] Sibilo Keno, "Practice of Decentralization," 13.

[44] Lefort, "Post-2005 Interlude," 446-7.

[45] Pankhurst, *Local Accountability Mechanisms*, 11.

[46] We are indebted to René Lefort for this observation (E-mail correspondence, January 16, 2011).

[47] Yilmaz and Venugopal, "Local Government Discretion," 12; for Oromiya see also Pausewang, "View from Below," 72.

[48] Article 45 of the Oromiya constitution grants the regional government the right to establish "other" administrative structures that "may be necessary" (Oromiya Regional State, "Revised Constitution," art. 45).

[49] HRW, "Suppressing Dissent," 30.

[50] Heads of household (usually male) are referred to as *abba warra* in Oromiffa and pay taxes to local government for the land they 'own'. In case a male head of household dies, his widow inherits his *garee* membership as well as his land and duty to pay taxes.

[51] The *gott* in Oromiya refers to the *gott* in Amhara or *qushet* in Tigray, which are also placed between the *kebele* and the *garee*. The *garee* or *garee misoma* finds its equivalent in the *limat budin* in Amhara and the *gudjle lm'at* in Tigray. Despite the similarities, different reports indicate slight difference regarding the constitution of these sub-*kebeles* in different regions. See also Lefort, "Post-2005 Interlude," 448-9; Segers et al., "Be Like Bees," 8, 13; Yilmaz and Venugopal, "Local Government Discretion," 4.

[52] Bevan and Pankhurst, "Power Structures," 134; Pankhurst, *Local Accountability Mechanisms*, 12; Segers et al., "Be Like Bees," 13. For a description of the *mengistawi budin* and its recent counterpart, the *lema'at budin* (development team), see Vaughan and Tronvoll (*Culture of Power*, 40).

[53] Interview with elder and young farmer, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009.

[54] Teferi Abate, "Decentralized There," 611.

[55] Bevan, "MDG-ing," 63.

[56] Dessalegn Rahmato, *Peasant and the State*, 331. HRW, "Ways of Putting Pressure," 23-4.

[57] HRW, "Development without Freedom"; HRW, "Suppressing Dissent"; HRW, "Ways of Putting Pressure."

[58] See for example HRW, "Ways of Putting Pressure," 23-4; or Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 40. Since both party and state structure at household level – the garee and the cell – are coordinated and organized by *kebele* leaders, the two can be subsumed as sub-*kebele*.

[59] Bevan, "MDG-ing," 22.

[60] Interview with farmer, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009.

[61] Human Rights Watch ("Suppressing Dissent," 30) dates the creation of the *gott* and *garee* to 2004.

[62] The WRRO was created as decentralization entered its second phase with the DLDP. As an executive sector office, it is run by the *woreda* administration and implements regional government policy.

[63] As an example of the national discourse see ERA, "Road Sector Development Programme."

[64] Interview with farmer, Meta Robi, August 24, 2009.

[65] The militia consists of *kebele* dwellers, mainly farmers, who are tasked with security. They receive basic military training, carry a gun and report to the *kebele* chairman and the head of security. According to local informants, one of the local *kebele* with about 900 inhabitants had 74 militia, while a neighboring *kebele* of 1 100 inhabitants had 250 militia. It is important to note that many militia are concomitantly *garee* leaders, which blurs their roles in everyday life.

[66] See also HRW, "Suppressing Dissent," 38.

[67] Harrison, "Problem with the Locals," 600; Lefort, "2005 Elections," 254; Pausewang, "Environmental Protection," 98.

[68] Pausewang, "Environmental Protection," 98.

[69] Interview with young farmer, Meta Robi, August 17, 2009.

[70] Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009.

[71] Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 16, 2009.

[72] Interview with head of Woreda Rural Road Office, Shino, August 24, 2009.

[73] Dessalegn Rahmato, *Peasant and the State*, 328.

[74] Pankhurst, *State and* Market, 12.

[75] Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 34.

[76] Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009.

[77] Interview with *kebele* manager, Shino, August 26, 2009.

[78] Interview with *garee* leader, Shino, August 22, 2009.

[79] Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 41.

[80] Interview with *cell* leader, Meta Robi, August 31, 2009.

[81] Interview with *kebele* manager, Meta Robi, August 18, 2009.

[82] Interview with former *gott* leader, Meta Robi, August 24, 2009.

[83] Interview with farmer, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009; former *gott* leader, Meta Robi, August 24, 2009.

[84] Interview with farmer, Meta Robi, August 16, 2009.

[85] Interview with elder, Metta Robi, August 31, 2009.

[86] Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 28, 2009.

[87] This seems to be one of the results of the "good governance" measures devised by EPRDF after 2005, including the "democratic right" to refuse to participate in meetings, community work or other intervention the right to refuse participating in government meetings (Bevan, "MDG-ing," 20).

[88] Interview with young farmer, August 22, 2009.

[89] Aspen, "Models of Democracy," 69.

[90] Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 31, 2009.

[91] Bevan ("MDG-ing," 13) notes that the "EPRDF structures is a potential route to upward mobility" as well as "a battleground for competing networks".

[92] The following section is drawn from an unpublished manuscript by the second author, which summarizes the main research findings of his nine months of field research in different localities in Oromiya (Sibilo Keno, "Practice of Decentralization"). The co-authors have copy-edited this section and inserted the (sub-)titles, but otherwise attempted to stick to the original wording.

[93] Informal discussions with farmers, students and teachers, Nansebo district of West Arsi zone, February 2008.

[94] Formal and informal discussions with elders, farmers, pastoralists, merchants, civil servants and district officials, Oromiya, 2008. See also Sibilo Keno, "Practice of Decentralization," 14.

[95] The armed struggle of the OLF is used by the OPDO to justify political repression at local level (HRW, "Suppressing Dissent"; Pausewang, "View from Below").

[96] This point was recently confirmed by Human Rights Watch ("Development without Freedom," 57) who reported that teachers in Ambo were forced to join the OPDO "or else be suspected of sympathizing with the rebel Oromo Liberation Front".

[97] *Areqee* is a locally made drink, which is much cheaper, but also stronger than beer.

[98] Interview with Tadele Nagisho, president of the Oromiya Regional State Supreme Court, Reporter Newspaper, Amharic version, April 5, 2009 (http://www.ethiopianreporter.com), translation by Sibilo Keno.

[99] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. *Federal Plan on District*, 3. Oromiya Regional State, *An Overview*, 19.

[100] See also Pausewang, "Democratic Dialogue," 187; Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 33; and more recently in Oromiya Fekadu Nigussa and Ignatius Mberengwa, "Productive Safety Net Program."

[101] This is not to deny serious human rights violations committed by state security organs in Oromiya upon orders of the EPRDF.

[102] Also Lefort ("Post-2005 Interlude," 450) reports that in his study area in Amhara Region *kebele* concil elections "were considered a non-event" and "entirely in the hands of the local officials".

[103] A very similar point is also made by Merera Gudina ("Ethnicity, Democratisation and Decentralization").

[104] Oromiya Regional State, "Revised Constitution," art. 103 (1).

[105] Interview with local elder, Oromia, 2008.